

Herland Revisited: The Perspective of Education among Herlanders

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Abstract

A close reading of Herland (1915), a feminist utopia written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, reveals a number of implications including the principle of organization of the community, portrayal of different gender signals, signs of patriarchal ways of thinking, restrictions imposed on women, and Herlandian ways in shaping their people to achieve an efficient community. In forming such a community, theories of learning, education, and training along with a variety of different perspectives and dimensions need to be considered since all these play a shaping role in educating people. The fact that most people lack the ability to utilize efficient theories and to have the knowledge to select from a wider range of possibilities in order to support learning arises the need for in-depth analysis of these different philosophies. Experiential learning provides such a philosophy which plays a unifying role in joining many of the existing theories to provide efficient and long-lasting learning occasions. This study investigates the meaning of experiential learning suggested by Kolb (1984) and relates this to the practices of Herlanders through the development of Kolb's experiential learning model.

Keywords: Herland, education, constructivism, experiential learning model, learning styles of Kolbian cycle

1. Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is distinctive among other utopian writers since she earned a comfortable place among the writings of feminist critics. Gilman embraced cultural work and demonstrated that women were not constrained within traditional modes of being- wife/motherhood; however, they could perform different social roles just as men did (Kessler, 1994).

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In radical feminism, the applying of women to violence is legitimized. Hence, radical feminism stresses that ‘emancipation and equality’ on male terms does not fulfill the required change; therefore, a total transformation needs to be performed in order to organize the social structures and eliminate the processes of patriarchy (Rowland & Klein, 1996, p. 12). Gilman is a prominent reformist feminist as the utopian world she creates in *Herland* does not include violence to evaluate gender inequalities. (Zeidanin & Shehabat, 2012, p. 21). Moreover, Gilman (1999, p. 19) argues that men severely limit women’s autonomy and full-expression and she adds that by the nineteenth century it was common to have an attitude which suggested the dominance of one sex over the other. However, Gilman felt the need to restore the ‘original balance’.

Witnessing the events which had a profound effect on the development of the American society, Gilman could not resist commenting on the social order, and particularly the effects of these social changes on the status of women. She ‘used her energies and her gifts in an effort to understand the world and her place in it and to extend that knowledge and those insights to others’ (Lane, 1990, p. 229). In her stories, Gilman represents her ideas through the characters she creates. For her, literature is cultural work; thus, she complies with the kind of literature which can enact social changes, function as the means to trigger social action and can bear different versions/visions of human action. Moreover, Gilman’s utopian fiction, which might be said to have a dialogic relationship with readers, is instructive and her didactic genre ignites transformational possibilities of writing and reading; for this reason the fiction and non-fiction of hers invite the readers to participate in the dialogue both verbally and behaviorally (Kessler & Gilman, 1995, p. 4).

Prior to the publication of *Herland*, there had passed almost exactly four hundred years following Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), which suggests that utopian narrative was kind of a genre which was primarily dominated by men (Ferns, 1998, p. 24). Thus, the narrative was thought to embody a male fantasy.

Gilman, in contrast, refuses the definitions of traditional gender roles and to this end; the utopian fiction Gilman wrote was situated on the cultural boundary between both genders. With her utopian fiction, Gilman prompts her readers to inquire the boundaries which described behavior on the basis of traditional male and female roles (Kessler, qtd. in Donaverth and Kolmerten, 1994, p. 127).

In *Herland*, Gilman envisions a technologically advanced civilization. It is an efficient society where people depend on science instead of religion to achieve a rationale of right and wrong. For the analysis, *Herland* will serve to help the researcher to find the traces of the concept of education; however, education as a theme is going to be analyzed based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Kolb (1984, p. 41) defines learning within the body of experiential learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. According to Kolb (1984) knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. Both the educational practices of Herlanders revealing the rationale of education within the community and the concept of education revealing the instances of the women's educational practices to educate the three explorers- Terry, Jeff and Van will be explicitly explained.

Experiential learning is acknowledged as an important approach within the theoretical tradition of adult education in Europe, North America and Australia (Miettinen, 2000). Gentry (1990) defends that the importance of experience cannot be underestimated, yet the conditions in which learning occur should be assured in order to guarantee effective resultant learning. Various scholars have defined experiential learning in different ways. Dewey (1915) suggests that experiential learning embodies a process in which learners learn by actively doing. On the other hand, Wolfe and Byrne (1975) state that experiential learning means experience-based learning in nature. Hoover (1974) contends that experiential learning embodies more than the cognitive learning.

Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement (Hoover & Whitehead, 1975, p. 25).

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005) experiential learning is based on six premises. Firstly, learning process is considered to be a process rather than an outcome within experiential theory; therefore, learning process can be improved by engaging learners in a process which provides them with the feedback they need in order to assess the effectiveness of their efforts to learn. Thus, learning experience is conceived as 'reconstruction of experience' as noted by Dewey (1897, p. 79).

Secondly, learning is considered to be learning within the body of experiential learning theory. This suggests that the learning process of any group of learners can be enhanced through drawing on learners' experiences, beliefs and attitudes so as to examine and evaluate their learning. This evaluation leads to the integration of new and subtle ideas (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Furthermore, conflicts play a major role in adapting to the world within experiential learning theory. This means differences and conflicts between two modes of thinking trigger the learning process and accordingly any learner has to be engaged in different modes of reflection and action as well as feeling and thinking (Kolb, 1984).

In addition, learning is considered to be an integrative and a holistic process within the body of experiential learning. Learners have to think, feel, perceive and behave and learning embodies the functioning of these four modes, which means that the person functions totally in order to adapt to the world. Besides, there exist synergetic transactions between the person and the environment. This means learning is performed through assimilating experiences and accommodating these experiences into existing concepts so as to provide equilibrium in Piaget's (1970) terms. Overall, experiential learning proposes a constructivist approach to learning in that learning occurs through the social creation of knowledge. Hence, the learner experiences 'the process of creation at all levels of sophistication, from the most advanced forms of scientific research to the child's discovery that a rubber ball bounces'. Thus, knowledge derives from the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge (Kolb, 1984, p. 36).

Although there are various structures proposed by different scholars, Kolb's four stage model of learning will provide the foundation for experiential learning within the body of this study. Within the body of Kolb's model, experience is grasped through two related modes: Concrete experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and these stages are transformed into experiences through Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE).

According to the four-stage learning cycle of Kolb concrete experiences stage provides the basis for observations and reflections. Then, these reflections are assimilated by the learner and transformed into abstract concepts for the learner to draw on new implications for their future learning. In Kolb's learning cycle, these implications can be tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences for the learners (Stenberg & Zhang, 2000).

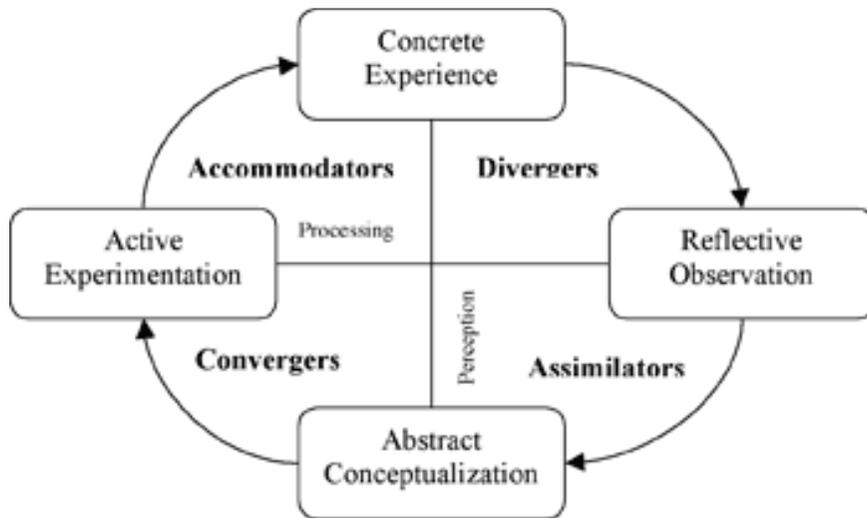


Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Embedded Styles (Jenkins, 1998: 43)

Learners in *Herland* seem to grasp new knowledge, new skills, or attitudes through encountering four modes of experiential learning throughout the novella. They prove themselves to be effective learners since they incorporate four different kinds of abilities effectively. These are *concrete experience abilities* (CE), *reflective observation abilities* (RO), *abstract conceptualization abilities* (AC), and *active experimentation* (AE) abilities (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). Furthermore, Kolb states that overall learning effectiveness is enhanced when the learners are highly skilled in making use of all four modes of the learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). This reveals that both the children and the adults in *Herland* seem to involve themselves in the learning process and they also observe and reflect on their experiences attentively. Thus, through experience, their observations are integrated to various perspectives and learning proves to be efficient. These stages will be overtly pointed out in Gilman's *Herland* based on Kolb's experiential learning model.

2. Herland, Kolb's Experiential Model and Learning Styles

The learning style inventory (LSI) was developed by Kolb in 1971 in order to assess individual learning styles and a considerable amount of research on experiential learning model has focused on using this inventory with the aim of assessing different learning styles (Kolb, 1971, 1999; Hickox, 1991; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

These styles are the patterned ways which resolve the conflicts between concrete and abstract and between active and reflective. Kolb et. al. (2001) suggest that experiential learning model requires some abilities on the part of the learner to use these styles in specific learning situations. Kolb (1984) points out that each learner develops a certain patterned way to resolve the conflicts they face depending on their past experiences, hereditary factors and the demands of their surrounding environment. These conflicts are resolved in certain ways by different learners and these patterns are called the learning styles within the body of experiential learning theory (Kolb et. al., 2001).

2.1. Herland and Diverging Style

The style is called 'diverging' since the learners who adopt diverging style are good at generating ideas; thus they have broad cultural interests like gathering new information. Besides, learners with diverging style like group works, listening to others and receiving personalized feedback from others. Learners with diverging style tend to view concrete situations from manifold ways and the dominant learning abilities of diverging style are Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO) (Kolb et. al., 2001).

In Gilman's *Herland*, from the moment the men are captivated and onwards, the educational rationale behind the country seems more obvious. The imprisonment period of the men, which is intricately explained in Chapter 3, reveals the fact that, the men start to be educated by the women from their first contact with the women and onwards. From the men's captivity onwards, Terry, Van and Jeff are slowly integrated to the language and the culture of *Herland*. For example, the garments and the underwear the women provide for the men are overtly appreciated by Van. It is clear when he remarks 'They have worked out a mighty sensible dress, I'll say that for them' (Gilman, 1979, p. 26). Thus; it is apparent that the narrator's views, both physically and mentally, start to change.

Indeed, Herlanders reveal the learning abilities which are Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO) in that the process they conduct resembles a brainstorming session as Kolb et. al. (2001) maintain. Diverging learning style is explicit here since the men get interested in the women, their cultural interests including the clothes they wear. There is not a formal learning situation; however, the men start viewing the women from different points of view as well as the scene, which shows that they start generating information about Herlanders.

Hence, it is clear that the education within *Herland* reflects a theory of human development which situates the men in a socio-cultural context. The individual developments of the men derive from their social interactions with the women who share their cultural meanings. As a result, the men come to internalize these cultural meanings, construct knowledge in transaction with the environment; thus, both the men and the environment are changed (Popkewitz, 1998). This is revealing in terms of the Herlanders' tendency to adopt diverging style in that the women are keen on listening to the men and share the knowledge of theirs to receive feedback (Kolb, 1984). Just as the learner in constructivist theory is expected to be involved in discussions in order to enhance their learning, the women in *Herland*, very similarly, involve the men as well as themselves in the learning process thoroughly. Besides, the way the women treat the men in *Herland* resembles the main features of facilitative teachers as Dunn (2002) notes. These are as follows: (1) They are less protective of their constructs and beliefs than other teachers, they are more able to listen to learners, especially to their feelings. (2) They are inclined to pay as much attention to their relationship with learners as to the content of the course. Furthermore, they accept feedback, both positive and negative and use it as constructive insight into themselves and their behavior (Dunn, 2002, p. 2).

In addition, Elliot (2007, p. 48) states that teachers should reflect on their own questioning techniques to ensure that questions are open-ended without an expected answer. Learners should be expected to discuss thoughts with their peers and teachers should be the propeller of all discussion. The emphasis should be on the language used, not the communication of what is already known, but as a tool for hearing what learners think out and as a means of extracting ideas and clarifying thought. By the time children have grasped information from their tutors, they should continue to exchange ideas and views with other pupils and request feedback from the teacher in order to consolidate their learning.

(Elliot, 2007, p. 48; Bennet & Dunne qtd. in Moon & Mayes, 1994, p. 54). This sort of education clearly resembles the way Herlanders teach their fellows and the three men who try to explore their countries. Again, it is obvious that the impulse of experience triggers the ideas to move. Furthermore, their assigning one tutor to each man reveals that Herlanders use diverging style in that their concrete experience (CE) and reflective observation (RO) abilities are dominant.

They are keen on gathering new information through having communication with the men and also they like group works so as to gather new information (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Particularly, one of Van's comments is significant in that he emphasizes the high level of intelligence among the women in *Herland*: '... We boast a good deal of our "high level of general intelligence" and our "compulsory public education," but in proportion to their opportunities they were far better educated than our people' (Gilman, 1979, p. 61). The women were also seem to be good at grasping knowledge about the outside world. Van quotes '... they constructed a sort of working outline to fill in as they learned more' (Gilman, 1979, p. 61). Moreover, the women are different from the usual audience in the sense that they thoroughly master what they are given and they are also prepared with their notes and questions to inquire the outside world enthusiastically (Gilman, 1979, p. 62). These features of the women's way of educating the men demonstrate that there exists a connection between the collective and the individual consciousness through 'collective subjectivity' (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 392). Indeed, the women prove that they practice cooperation among its people, which portrays their use of diverging style. For instance, Van, the sociologist of the group, argues that the women are very good at cooperating with each other to enhance their learning. Therefore, parents or teachers are responsible for transmitting knowledge to those who are less knowledgeable through both formal and informal means about the world through increased actions and interactions with the environment. This means that the social external environment of the learners is not considered to be fixed and self-sufficient within *Herland*. In contrast, the social world is constantly shaped by collective participation and collaboration, which are the major characteristics of experiential learning. Bruner and Haste (1987, p. 116-118) also claim that learning is dependent on socio-cultural influences. This kind of learning is clearly made explicit in Van's quotation. It is clear that the social side of learning is emphasized in *Herland*.

They began with a really high degree of social development, something like that of Ancient Egypt or Greece. Then they suffered the loss of everything masculine, and supposed at first that all human power and safety had gone too. Then they developed the virgin birth capacity. Then, since the prosperity of their children depended on it, the fullest and subtlest coordination began to be practised (Gilman, 1979, p. 63).

It is palpable that the women in *Herland* pay enough attention to the interests of the men; they inquire, and assess the answers of the men and accept them as feedback in order to use them as constructive insights into their lives. The discussion about dogs, which are kept as pets in the outside world, also bewilders women in *Herland*. They are surprised at the idea that they are vulnerable to many diseases as well. However, they still continue to listen to the men in their understanding manner and furnish the men with their own books and materials (Gilman, 1979, p. 51). Similarly, the women express their distaste overtly about their tradition of burying the dead by stating some logical assumptions of theirs. Van remarks that he finds the women ‘reasonable’ and they succeed in teaching the men their language (Gilman, 1979, p. 53). Thus, it is clear that the role of social collectivity in individual learning and development is apparent in the community. Indeed, all these discussions between the men and the women in *Herland* demonstrate that there is ‘the social-internalisation through sign meditation- restructuring conceptual system- new understanding / consciousness’ (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 392). When Van tells the history of *Herland* delicately in Chapter 5, it is apparent that the women devised ways to keep their farms and gardens in full production, and they also made considerable effort in order to teach their little group of sisters ‘in the best teaching they were capable of’. They passed their skill and knowledge to the next generation of mothers and thought it was of vital importance (Gilman, 1979, p. 54). This reflects the common perception of Herlanders as seeing cultural development and learning process ‘as any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. It appears between people as an ‘interpsychological category’, and then within the child as an ‘intrapsychological category’ (Wertsch, 1985, p. 60).

2.2. Herland and Assimilating Style

Learners with assimilating style tend to have abilities which make them successful at understanding ‘a wide range of information and putting into concise, logical form’ (Kolb et. al., 2001, p. 5).

The dominant abilities of learners of this style are the keen ability to understand abstract concepts and to focus on ideas instead of people. People with this style are interested in taking their time to consider things thoroughly, exploring analytical models, and choosing readings and lectures in formal learning situations (Kolb et. al., 2001).

Moreover, Kolb and Kolb (2005) state that the dominant learning abilities of learners with assimilating style are Active Experimentation (AE) and Reflective Observation (RO).

When the women lay real printed books in order to teach the men their language and learn theirs as well, the men realise that they do not have any former experience with regard to teaching their language. However, they observe the surrounding conditions and they benefit from the information, advice and warning of the women who seem to have a wider experience. The attitudes of the women are revealing in terms of their learning styles. Since the women help the men to grasp, perceive and take hold of their language as well as learning theirs through symbolic representation, abstract conceptualization occurs. The books Herlanders give reveal the fact that the women do not use didactic methods; however, the way they want to teach the males reveals assimilating style in that women carefully watch the men who are involved in the experience of learning a new language. Therefore, the women, as being the watchers in Kolb's (1984) terms, favour reflective observation whereas the men prefer active experimentation since they try out the new language in order to communicate to Herlanders. The women also seem to organize a formal learning situation in that they have provided books to pass their knowledge to the men. Therefore, it seems certain that women in *Herland* seem to have an assimilating style in that they provide readings for the men to refer to; thus, they use assimilating style in order to help the men, albeit unconsciously, to explore the language, which seems to exist as a sample of an authentic analytical model.

We were indeed to learn the language, and not only that, but to teach our own. There were blank books with parallel columns, neatly ruled, evidently prepared for the occasion, and in these, as fast as we learned and wrote down the name of anything, we were urged to write our own name for it by its side (Gilman, 1979, p. 27).

Furthermore, the concept of education continues to be revealed in more detail as the men have the chance to wander freely in *Herland* in Chapter 8. Van describes *Herland* through the men's point of view and it is certain that the men start to feel far more comfortable as they have grasped the language.

Van goes on to give an account of *Herland* deriving from their experiences acting as lecturers; thus, the education system is portrayed more clearly.

... Just a multitude of girls: quiet, eager, watchful, all eyes and ears to listen and learn. ... We were eager to see it, and deeply impressed. To us, at first, these women, unavoidably ignorant of what to us was the basic commonplace of knowledge, had seemed on the plane of children, or of savages. What we had been forced to admit, with growing acquaintance, was that they were ignorant as Plato and Aristotle were, but with a highly developed mentality quite comparable to that of Ancient Greece. Far it be from me to lumber these pages with an account of what we so imperfectly strove to teach them. The memorable fact is what they taught us, or some faint glimpse of it... (Gilman, 1979, p. 80).

The traces of experiential learning within the community of Herlanders can be overtly observed here since experience always plays an active role, new concepts are formed and constantly adjusted (Kolb, 1984). Further, Van's remarks about the way women learn clearly demonstrate that the purpose of education is to trigger inquiry among the community and to improve their capacities. Similarly, Bruner (1966, p. 72) argues that 'Knowing is a process, not a product' just as it is within *Herland* community. Besides, the fact that the women tend to inquire the men attentively to the extent that the men are unable to answer them effectively reveals the fact that the women are inherently willing to learn (Gilman, 1979, p. 80). Put simply, the learning process in *Herland* suggests that learning is a process which derives from relearning since every woman in the community is eager to be involved in every learning situation with more or less coherent ideas about the topics. The women have keen reflective observation and active experimentation abilities in that they can easily deal with abstract concepts, focus on ideas and organize new information into concise form (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Moreover, upon their visit to *Herland*, the three men come to realize that they never face the rudeness of the children, which they cannot observe in the outside world. Van states that the children in *Herland* start their lives with the notions of 'Peace, Beauty, Order, Safety, Love, Wisdom, Justice, Patience, and Plenty' (Gilman, 1979, p. 93), demonstrating their keen interest in ideas and abstract concepts. This reveals that Herlanders' assimilating style is overt since the dominant abilities they have are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO).

The way children are brought up in *Herland* reveals that Herlanders are good at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into a concise form as well as educating the children of their community (Kolb et. al., 2001).

The method of the education of the children shows that Herlanders are effective carriers of information. Besides, maybe the most important of all is the abundant experience of living portrayed in their daily lives and also the fact that everything they learn is 'RELATED' (Gilman, 1979, p. 94). Indeed, they not only help their children with their readings, lectures and but also make sure that the way they teach their own children has logical soundness in giving them abstract concepts. They had their own kind. There was a most impressive array of pageantry, of processions, a sort of grand ritual, with their arts and their religion broadly blended. The very babies joined it. To see one of their great annual festivals, with the massed and marching stateliness of those great mothers, the young women brave and noble, beautiful and strong; and then the children, taking part as naturally as ours would frolic round a Christmas tree- it was overpowering in the impression of joyous, triumphant life. They had begun at a period when the drama, the dance, music, religion, and education were all very close together; and instead of developing them in detached lines, they had kept the connection.... (Gilman, 1979, p. 93).

As Van discovers more about the education process of children he comes to appreciate the perfect system of child-rearing practice since the children are all provided with a range of interests and associations as alternatives. Indeed, Van confesses that he feels 'a sense of race-humility' grows apace towards his own world when he discovers that the children are provided with the most suitable surroundings for their well being. (Gilman, 1979, p. 97). It could be claimed that since assimilation tends to be a dominant factor in *Herland*, the process of cognitive development also occurs in successive stages, each of which builds on to a new and higher level of cognitive functioning (Kolb, 1984). Indeed, the mental nourishment of the children of *Herland* is considerably revealed when Van explicitly inquires Ellador about their education system (Gilman, 1979). Ellador's reply and also the way she inquires him is striking since she uses a tag question:

...Here is a young human being. The mind is as natural a thing as the body, a thing that grows, a thing to use and enjoy. We seek to nourish, to stimulate, to exercise the mind of a child as we do the body.

There are two main divisions in education- you have those of course?- the things it is necessary to know, and the things it is necessary to do... Our general plan is this: In the matter of feeding the mind, of furnishing information, we use our best powers to meet the natural appetite of a healthy young brain; not to overfeed it, to provide such amount and variety of impressions as seem most welcome to each child.

That is the easiest part. The other division is in arranging a properly graduated series of exercises which will best develop each mind; the common faculties we have. You do this, do you not? (Gilman, 1979, p. 98).

The attitudes of the women are revealing in terms of their higher forms of adaptation into the world. What is more, there is creativity and personal development. Through their questions, the women seem to embody a creative process of learning in that they are thoroughly involved in the central process of human adaptation to ‘the social and physical environment’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 31). Van also makes this point explicit: ‘I ceased to feel a stranger, a prisoner. There was a sense of understanding, or identify, of purpose. We discussed- everything’ (Gilman, 1979, p. 84). Moreover, Van states that the learning process they have been involved in includes fun and higher comradeship (Gilman, 1979, p. 85). Thus, the tendency of Herlanders to focus more on ideas instead of people is explicitly stated, which reflects their assimilating style. They take time to think all the things thoroughly and through their questions, they succeed in carrying information to create abstract conceptualization of their community as well as of strangers.

2.3. Herland and Converging Style

Learners adopting converging style are good at solving problems and making decisions based on finding solutions to problems or questions; thus, this type of learners are interested in technical tasks and problems rather than interpersonal or social affairs. The dominant abilities of the learner with convergent style are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE) (Kolb et. al. 2001). Moreover, they favor experimenting with new ideas, being involved in simulations and such practical applications (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). One of the sharpest statements which clearly reveal the rationale behind *Herland* is the way of education portrayed in Chapter 7. During a discussion with the tutor Somel, Van inquires her about the faults of their community.

Somel accepts the question with courtesy and responds by saying: “Of course we have faults- all of us.... We have, of course, made it our first business to train out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types. ... If the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood. Some of the few worst types were, fortunately, unable to reproduce.

But if the fault was in a disproportionate egotism- then the girl was sure she had the right to have children, even that hers would be better than others.” (Gilman, 1979, p. 77).

Besides, when the explorers begin to form couples to teach them about the outside world, it is clear that the three women -Celis, Alima and Ellador- had already chosen ‘their men’ when the men were wandering around their country, studying the land and people, while being studied unconsciously by the women (Gilman, 1979, p. 86). This shows that the women focus on concrete and reflective factors so as to adapt and make decisions. Their concrete experience and reflective observation abilities are explicit here since the women like generating ideas by assigning one tutor to each man and this way they try to benefit from group works to collect information about the outside world. For them, the basic processes of human adaptation lie behind the scientific method. Accordingly, this method provides them with the means to get integrated with the outside world completely (Kolb, 1984). The process of the education is revealed most explicitly in Van’s words as follows:

They had faced the problems of education and solved them that their children grew up as naturally as young trees; learning through every sense; taught continuously but unconsciously- never knowing they were being educated. In fact, they did not use the word as we do. Their idea of education was the special training they took, when half grown up, under experts. Then the eager young minds fairly flung themselves on their chosen subjects, and acquired with as ease, a breadth, a grasp, at which I never ceased to wonder (Gilman, 1979, p. 89).

Thus, the rationale behind the education system of *Herland* is revealed as being considerably broader than that of traditional classrooms. The learning process can be observed in all settings regardless of any strict limitations. This could be any human setting from workshop to office and from laboratory to studio (Gilman, 1979, p. 92), and any life stage, from childhood to old age; thus, it suggests lifelong learning (Kolb, 1984). Kelly (qtd. in Kolb, 1984) also articulates a common theme which suggests that ‘all forms of human adaptation approximate scientific inquiry’ (Gilman, 1979, p. 32).

By concretely experiencing the outside world through the men, Herlanders try to receive personalized feedback about their own community (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In addition, Van states that *Herland* started at a period when all kinds of arts and education were interconnected and he suggests that Herlanders have always managed to keep the connection while they have managed to develop it (Gilman, 1979). This suggests a holistic adaptive process since the learning provides conceptual bridges across different life situations. Thus, the learners are involved in creativity, problem solving, decision making, and scientific research (Kolb, 1984, p. 33-34). Indeed, according to Elliot (2007), failure could also lead to learning in that learners might face the world in a particular way, and the otherwise might occur. Thus, the women make mistakes, and by accommodating this new experience into their mental representations, they learn from the experience of failure or others' failures within the body of experiential learning theory.

2.4. Herland and Accommodating Style

People who adopt accommodating learning style prefer to have first-hand experiences and they also like to be involved in new and challenging experiences in order to act. A learner with accommodating style has Concrete Experience (CE) and Active Experimentation (AE) as dominant learning abilities. Accordingly, people adopting this learning style are good at getting assignments done, setting goals, doing fieldwork and experimenting with a great number of approaches in order to complete a task (Kolb et. al, 2001).

It is obvious from different instances that women in *Herland* devised sets of principles and developed their country around a logical perspective. Gilman portrays the first glimpse of the land through the eyes of the men in order to reveal their patriarchal assumptions about womanhood (Arnold, 2006). The story starts with the men trying to find a landing place to get a closer look of the country and it is certain that and each man seems to have some views prior to their journey to *Herland*; however, upon their arrival in the country they have to incorporate their new experiences into their established mental frameworks. This view again parallels with experiential learning theory in that through firsthand experiences, the men have the chance to actively experiment with the community and face with challenging experiences.

For instance, the dialogue between Terry and Jeff reveals a kind of cognitive map, which is concretized through their beliefs and attitudes towards women.

Prior to embarking upon their journey, Terry and Jeff make some comments about *Herland*. 'They would fight among themselves... We mustn't look to find any sort of order and organization... Also we mustn't look to find for interventions and progress; it will be awfully primitive' Terry insists (Gilman, 1979, p. 9). In contrast to Terry, Jeff idolizes *Herland* and he states that 'It will be like a nunnery under an abbess- a peaceful, harmonious sisterhood' (Gilman, 1979, p. 9). These views of Terry and Jeff represent their cognitive maps and reveal their assumptions about womanhood. In other words, the comments reveal their pre-exploratory maps of women in general. However, even through their first contact with the women, the two men have to reframe their mental representations about women, and they add to their learning through their experience of meeting the women in the new country.

Upon this astonishment of the male explorers, the narrator, Van, adds that the women are 'Civilized and still arboreal- peculiar people' (Gilman, 1979, p. 17). Thus, all these struggles to have a closer look of the country result in the men's finding themselves challenged and learning through social activity. Besides, their presuppositions -their conceptual maps- about women are overtaken by the women in *Herland*; thus, they have to adjust their presumptions accordingly. Van, the narrator, also verifies the presumptions of the male explorers by saying:

It makes me laugh, knowing all I do now, to think of us three boys- nothing else; three audacious impertinent boys- butting into an unknown country without any sort of a guard or defense. We seemed to think that if there were men we could fight them, and if there were only women- why, they would be no obstacles at all. (Gilman, 1979, p. 21)

Indeed, the men find themselves corralled by the women and when they attempt to fight the women, they find themselves psychically weak and they have to reverse their conceptual gender map in their minds.

Instantly each of us was seized by five women, each holding arm or leg or head; we were lifted like children, straddling helpless children, and borne onward, wriggling indeed, but most ineffectually (Gilman, 1979, p. 23).

Therefore, it is certain that from the very beginning of their first encounter with the women in *Herland*, the men are slowly taught, albeit implicitly, by the women that they have some preconceptions about women, which prove to be misleading.

Moreover, the education of the children in *Herland* also demonstrates ample contexts of the accommodating style since development from infancy to adulthood starts with a concrete phenomenal view of the world and it proceeds to the more experimental view of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The narrator, Van, points out Ellador's explanations in order to reflect the nature of education. For him, the children in *Herland* find themselves in a supporting and lovely world, which is full of interesting and intriguing things. These things prompt the children of Herland to develop themselves.

In each step of rich experience of living, they found the instance they were studying widen out into contact with an endless range of common interests. The things they learnt were RELATED, from the first; related to one another, and to the national prosperity. "It was a butterfly that made me a forester," said Ellador. "I was about eleven years old, and I found a big purple-and-green butterfly on a low flower. I caught it, very carefully, by the closed wings, as I had been told to do, and carried it to the nearest insect teacher" – I made a note there to ask her what on earth an insect teacher was – "to ask her its name. She took it from me with a little cry of delight (Gilman, 1979, p. 94).

Furthermore, what Ellador emphasizes illustrates a focal view of learning. Ellador tells Van about her experience of meeting an obernut for the first time in Chapter 9. This instance illustrates the accommodating style of Herlanders and it is also representative of holistic learning. Upon finding a butterfly on a flower and taking it to her teacher, the teacher willingly fosters her attempt by saying:

'Oh, you blessed child, ... Do you like obernuts? ... they are almost gone. We have been trying to exterminate them for centuries. If you had not caught this one, it might have laid eggs enough to raise worms enough to destroy thousands of our nut trees- thousands of bushels of nuts- and make years and years of trouble for us' (Gilman, 1979, p. 94).

It is apparent that the children start the learning process by themselves - through concrete experience- and then an account of the related information is presented so that the children can accommodate the new information through actively experimenting with things.

This practice reflects the accommodating style of Kolb (1984) in that the learning process is ‘a cycle of interaction between the individual and the environment that is similar to the models of Dewey and Lewin’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 23). Ellador’s realization of a dangerous insect is illustrative of the mutual interaction of the process of accommodation; thus, she learns that that insect is harmful, which shows that experience from the world is adapted into existing schemas and concepts (Kolb, 1984). Van also suggests that their ethics is based on ‘the full perception of evolution, showed the principle of growth and the beauty of wise culture’ and he also suggests that there are no strict oppositions of the good and the bad since life means growth to them and they take great pleasure in growing (Gilman, 1979, p. 95).

In Chapter 5, the men feel surprised by the fact that the women have been able to tame the wild beasts in the country and to develop a race of cats that do not sing (Gilman, 1979, p. 47). The narrator, Van, also finds it interesting that the women show their attitudes toward something they hear and learn. He states that they never express horror and disapproval, nor indeed much surprise. All they do is to have a keen interest. Moreover, he finds it significant that the women almost always make notes, even ‘miles of them’ (Gilman, 1979, p. 48). This is also significant as it shows that the learner is considered as an entity that actively makes sense and thus, new methods of instruction emphasizing hands-on activity and discussion are suggested just as it is suggested within the body of the constructivist theory (Reigeluth & Carr-Chellman, 1996). Indeed, the women prefer to have first-hand experiences even with the animals and the nature around them and they accept these as the opportunities to experiment with different approaches in order to perform a task (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The tendency of the women to deal with the nature closely reflects that they have concrete experience abilities in that they actively experiment with their immediate surroundings, which makes their accommodating style of learning revealing (Kolb, 1984). Apart from psychological constructivism, which regards the purpose of education as educating individuals in accordance with their needs and interests, learning in *Herland* also portrays itself as a social enterprise. Although the learning process in *Herland* demonstrates a fashion which emphasizes the individualistic nature of learning, the social perspective is still apparent.

Experiential learning is again revealed when Ellador describes the options they provide for their children. It is palpable that at the initial stages, the child adopts a learning style which is concrete and active, which reminds the sensory motor stage of Piaget, where the child is trying to perform goal-oriented behaviors.

Flawell (1963, p. 107) also states that this stage ‘shows a remarkable evolution from non-intentional habits to experimental and exploratory activity’. Similarly, the children in *Herland* are provided with surroundings in which they can develop themselves. Van also states that they provide choices for the children, simple choices, with very obvious causes and consequences. Games are parts of these practices (Gilman, 1979, p. 99), which also demonstrates that Herlanders attach great importance to concrete experiences so that those experiences could lead to active experimentation of the children in their community. Moreover, Van points out that the babies in *Herland* can swim even before they walk. When he observes the intensive system of culture he notices that these children are never educated in the sense they educate their people. Additionally, these children never know that they are being educated. Van believes that the rationale underlying their concept of education is ‘the education for citizenship’ (Gilman, 1979, p. 101). Learning in *Herland* focuses on the process of ‘human adaptation to the social and physical environment’ (Kolb, 1984, p. 31).

3. Conclusion

Within the body of this article, the concept of experiential learning has been emphasized through Herlanders’ various practices. Drawing on the foundational theories of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget, the researcher has examined experiential learning and has explored how this theory was reflected through the practices of women in *Herland*. The framework of the learning styles has also been presented to illustrate the interface between Kolb’s styles and Herlanders’ practices in achieving a decent society. In the study, all the styles of the Kolbian cycle, including convergent, divergent, assimilating and accommodating styles, have been manifested and the fact that knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience has been confirmed (Kolb, 1984). Drawing on the experiential learning model, it was revealed that Herlanders focused on process rather than product and improved the learning process by engaging the outsiders as well as their own people in a process which provided them with feedback.

Besides, the women provided learning opportunities by deriving from the experiences, beliefs and attitudes of the learners in order to contribute to the process.

This way, new ideas were created and integrated to the existing ones among the Herlandian community.

Conflicts also played a major role in adapting to the world in *Herland* and these conflicts created opportunities for the learners to have the chances for engaging in different modes of reflection and actions as well as thinking and feeling processes (Kolb, 1984). It was observed that Herlanders thought, felt, perceived and behaved through four modes of Kolbian cycle.

Kolb and Kolb (2005, p. 205) also state that ‘The enhancement of experiential learning in higher education can be achieved through the creation of learning spaces that promote growth- producing experiences for learners.’ Indeed, it is emphasized that such an experience provides respect for learners and their experiences by involving learners’ physical and social surroundings as well as their quality of relationships. Therefore, gaining such awareness may prove to be useful in guiding our future learners. Additionally, Fenwick (2001) maintains that experiential learning also plays a major role in adult education both as a philosophy and a technique. It is clear that learning is fulfilled through considering the ‘individuals’ purposes, modes of interpretation and engagement in experience, understanding of self and subjectivity, the relation between individuals and their contexts, and dimensions of gender, culture, class and so forth...’, which fundamentally play a molding role in receiving knowledge and grasping experience (Fenwick, 2001, p. 8).

Overall, experiential learning proposes a constructivist approach to learning in that learning occurs through the social creation of knowledge. Hence, the learner experiences ‘the process of creation at all levels of sophistication, from the most advanced forms of scientific research to the child’s discovery that a rubber ball bounces’. Therefore, knowledge derives from the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge (Kolb, 1984, 36).

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